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THE HARTLEYS

A Play in One Act

By

ARTHUR ECKERSLEY

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CHARACTERS

RUPERT HARTLEY.

MRS. HARTLEY.

HESTER.

GEORGE PERRIN.

MAID.

SCENE.—*The Hartleys' Parlour, in a street off the King's Road,
Brighton.*

TIME.—*Evening in early Spring.*

THE HARTLEYS

Was produced at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester (under the management of Miss Horniman), on Monday, August 21, 1916, with the following cast:—

RUPERT HARTLEY	<i>Percy Foster.</i>
GEORGE PERRIN	<i>C. Wordley Hulse.</i>
MRS. HARTLEY	<i>Mrs. A. B. Tapping</i>
HESTER	<i>Helen Temple.</i>
SUSAN	<i>Marie Hill.</i>

The play produced by DOUGLAS GORDON.

THE HARTLEYS

The scene represents an ordinary middle-class sitting-room. Very respectable. Furniture heavy and uncomfortable, with the exception of one easy wicker chair before the fire.

There is one door R. Fireplace, with fire burning, L. Table in centre of room, partially laid for high tea. Chairs for three round it. The easy chair above fireplace; another, smaller and not so comfortable, below.

When the curtain rises, MRS. HARTLEY, an ineffectively looking, pale woman in a cap and shawl, is discovered knitting in armchair above fireplace L.

MRS. HARTLEY half rises and looks at clock on mantelshelf, then sits again. Immediately afterwards the door opens, and HESTER appears.

HESTER is a girl of about 29. She comes in quickly, smoothing her hair and dress, which are in slight disorder, as though outdoor things had just been removed.

MRS. HARTLEY (glancing up, speaking in a faintly complaining voice.) Oh, so there you are. I thought you were never coming. It's close upon half-past six.

HESTER. Isn't that clock a bit fast?

MRS. HARTLEY. It's slow if it's anything. Your father might be home any minute. Where have you been?

HESTER (evasively.) Only as far as the pier for a blow.

MRS. HARTLEY. After dark? I doubt your father would be best pleased if he heard of it. You know how particular he is.

HESTER. Yes, I know.

MRS. HARTLEY (*with unconscious irony.*) You ought to. You're old enough.

HESTER. What time is tea?

MRS. HARTLEY. The same as usual. That's if he catches the half-past five from Victoria.

HESTER. He's got cutlets, hasn't he?

MRS. HARTLEY. And asparagus. I ordered half a bundle.

HESTER (*brightly.*) I'm glad of that. Asparagus-evenings are almost always good tempered.

MRS. HARTLEY. What a way to talk! (*Seeing HESTER advance towards the fire.*) What have you there?

HESTER. His slippers. I thought I'd put them to warm.

MRS. HARTLEY (*surprised.*) Well, you don't generally; but I dare say he'll not mind.

HESTER. I hope not. I do want him to be pleased to-night. (*Kneeling, she places slippers in fender.*)

MRS. HARTLEY (*after staring at her.*) Aren't you well?

HESTER. Oh yes, thanks; why?

MRS. HARTLEY. It doesn't seem like it. All this fussing about your father's comfort. It isn't natural.

HESTER (*still kneeling, turns to face MRS. HARTLEY.*) Has it ever occurred to you how old I am?

MRS. HARTLEY. My dear! (*Bewildered.*)

HESTER. I'm twenty-nine, and a bit over. Quite soon I shall be thirty; and I can remember the time—only the other day it seems—when that used to sound like old age. So by my way of reckoning I am almost an old woman.

MRS. HARTLEY. We all have to grow old.

HESTER. Yes, but in different ways. You were quite a girl when you married father, weren't you?

MRS. HARTLEY. I was seventeen.

HESTER. And you were very much in love with each other ?

MRS. HARTLEY. He was. He used to tell me he'd shoot himself if I didn't marry him.

HESTER (*slowly*.) Fancy being seventeen, and having somebody to say things like that.

MRS. HARTLEY. My dear, what are you talking about ?

HESTER. Mother, think, think. Do for once think of it from my point of view. What have I been doing all this time ? Just sitting here with you and father, and letting everything go by me. I've wanted not to mind. Night after night I've cried myself to sleep because I was too selfish to be satisfied.

MRS. HARTLEY. Everybody can't get husbands, if that's what you mean. You've had the same chance as other girls.

HESTER (*fiercely*.) No ! That's not true. Every chance—it's your own word—that I ever had, has been deliberately taken away from me. I know I'm not pretty, or attractive. I made up my mind to that. But in spite of it, there were people——
(*Breaks off*.)

MRS. HARTLEY. Oh, you're not so bad as all that.

HESTER. There have been just two. Do you remember that Mr. Thompson, whom I used to help at the library, six years ago ? He used to walk home with me. Then he asked if he could call. Well—You know what happened then !

MRS. HARTLEY. Your father never approved of that library. Almost a shop, he called it.

HESTER (*bitterly*.) Yes. It wasn't genteel enough for his daughter. Anyhow, that was the end of Thompson. And the other went the same way, only it didn't get quite so far.

MRS. HARTLEY. Your father is a very reserved man.

HESTER. Oh, I don't say I cared particularly for

either of them, not then. But they'd have been life, and home, and perhaps even—little children.

MRS. HARTLEY (*shocked.*) Hester! At least you needn't be rude!

HESTER. Anyhow, that's all in the past. And I thought it wasn't the sort of thing that was ever likely to come again.

MRS. HARTLEY. You don't mean to say it has? (*Beginning to see.*)

HESTER (*faces her, nods.*) Yes, apparently.

MRS. HARTLEY. Somebody else? Well, and what about your father?

HESTER (*points to slippers.*) That's why.

MRS. HARTLEY. You're going to tell him to night?

HESTER. I think—he—wants to tell him himself.

MRS. HARTLEY. I'm that surprised I don't know what to say. How did it happen?

HESTER. I hardly know. (*Sits in chair below fire.*) It all seemed to come so strangely. I think I saw him first, only about a fortnight ago, when I went out to the post in the evening. He used to be hanging about by the pillar-box.

MRS. HARTLEY (*grimly.*) Those pillar-boxes!

HESTER. I never thought he could be waiting for me. But he was. And—oh, I don't know—somehow he spoke to me, and one thing led to another. I met him once or twice by accident in the street. He used to smile, and perhaps walk a little way. And then one day I arranged to meet him.

MRS. HARTLEY (*shocked.*) Well! And just for that you think you love this stranger enough to be happy with him?

HESTER. I think so. But (*slowly*) it isn't being happy that matters, it's living.

MRS. HARTLEY (*ignoring epigrams.*) What's his name?

HESTER. Perrin. George Perrin.

MRS. HARTLEY. And what sort of a young fellow is he? A gentleman, or just a man?

HESTER. George Perrin works at something in London. I don't know what. He's here on a holiday.

MRS. HARTLEY. Well, what does he talk about ?

HESTER. Oh—me. And you. And Father. Everything. It seemed so queer that he should be so interested in us.

MRS. HARTLEY. And he's coming to see him to-night ?

HESTER. He asked particularly what time he'd be sure to find father at home.

MRS. HARTLEY. That looks like something. Did he ask what your father's business was ?

HESTER. I think he did. I forget. Anyhow, I couldn't have told him. Except in the city. That's all I know.

MRS. HARTLEY. That's all I've wanted to know, all these years. Your father was never one to babble. Keep yourself to yourself was always his motto.

HESTER. Oh ! (*Rising, startled.*)

MRS. HARTLEY. What is it ?

HESTER (*struck with an idea.*) I told him any time after half-past six. Suppose he comes before father's had his tea ?

MRS. HARTLEY. Hum ! That would be awkward. However, it can't be helped now. Hark ! (*Listening.*) There's his latch key.

(*MRS. HARTLEY rises with some difficulty, and transfers herself to the chair below fireplace, so as to leave the more comfortable one free for the Master.*)

HESTER (*under her breath.*) It must go right ! It must.

MRS. HARTLEY. I declare you've made me all of a flutter myself. But we must keep calm. And tell him gradually.

(*The door opens, and RUPERT HARTLEY comes in briskly. A capable man, with short beard, and*

quick, humorous eyes. Very quietly dressed. He carries a small bag such as might contain papers.)

HARTLEY (*nodding to them.*) Evening, mother. Hullo, kiddie. Well, here I am again. And glad to be back.

MRS. HARTLEY. Had a tiring day, father?

HARTLEY. So so. Bit more work than usual, because I'm giving up that Cannon Street office. (*He sits in easy chair before fire, and begins to remove boots.*) Shan't go back there again. Too inconvenient.

MRS. HARTLEY. Why, that's the third change this year.

HARTLEY. Yes, and I'll tell you what, old lady. I'm thinking about making a bigger change, and giving up altogether.

MRS. HARTLEY. Giving up?

HARTLEY. Ah! Chucking it. Settling down at home with you and the kiddie to enjoy my old age. I've earned it.

MRS. HARTLEY. Well!

HARTLEY. Haven't I? Every penny I have. Hullo! Who's been putting my slippers to warm

HESTER (*standing by table.*) I did, father.

HARTLEY (*playfully.*) Ha! Wants something out of her dad, I'll be bound. Yes, settle down. Walk on the pier in the mornings. May be an alderman before I've finished. (*To himself.*) That would be the crowning touch! (*Chuckling.*)

MRS. HARTLEY. I don't see why you shouldn't be, Rupert.

HARTLEY. Eh? (*Grave again.*) No, of course not. However, we can talk of that after tea. Nearly ready?

HESTER. Here's Susan just coming, father.

(*Enter SUSAN, a neat maid, in cap and apron. She carries a tray with tea things, etc. HESTER helps to lay table.*)

MRS. HARTLEY (*a little nervously.*) There's cutlets and asparagus.

HARTLEY. Capital! Well, how should you like to have me at home all day, eh, old lady?

MRS. HARTLEY. I'm sure it would be very pleasant, wouldn't it, Hester?

HARTLEY. Ah! And brighter for the kiddie. Take you and her on the steamers sometimes—Bournemouth, Hastings, all over the place.

MRS. HARTLEY. That would be nice.

HARTLEY. Get to know some of the best families, too, I daresay. I've always been against having people come chattering round when I wasn't here. But it'll be all different now.

(*Having changed his slippers, he lifts the small bag on to his knees, and begins glancing through its contents, papers, etc.*)

MRS. HARTLEY. Indeed, it will.

(*A slight pause. SUSAN, having finished her part in laying the table, goes out. MRS. HARTLEY and HESTER exchange looks. MRS. HARTLEY makes signs advising HESTER to speak.*)

HARTLEY (*still reading.*) Yes. The fools that think mine's been an easy job—are fools. But I've done it. How much d'you guess I'm going to bank over the last, eh, mother?

MRS. HARTLEY. The last what, dear?

HARTLEY (*catching himself up.*) Ah well, you wouldn't know the business terms. But it's working out at nearly three thousand pounds. And it takes a clever man to make that safely now'a'days.

MRS. HARTLEY. That it does, I'm sure.

HESTER (*nervng herself.*) Father.

HARTLEY. Eh?

HESTER. There's a visitor coming to see you to-night.

HARTLEY (*puts down paper, turns.*) Visitor ? What visitor ?

MRS. HARTLEY (*very nervously.*) Only a man, Rupert.

HARTLEY (*ignores her, speaks sharply to Hester.*) Who is it ?

HESTER. Mr. Perrin, his name is. A friend of mine.

HARTLEY. A friend of yours ?

MRS. HARTLEY. Just in a manner of speaking.

HARTLEY (*impatiently to MRS. HARTLEY.*) Cht ! Cht ! (*To HESTER.*) I don't understand. (*Looking from one to the other.*) What is all this mystery ? (*His voice has a note of anxiety, almost fear.*)

HESTER. It's some one who wants to speak to you about—something.

HARTLEY. Oh, does he ? And what, if I may ask ?

HESTER. It's about—father, surely you can understand.

MRS. HARTLEY (*explanatory.*) Like that young Thompson, from the library.

HARTLEY (*smiles.*) Oh ! That's it, is it ? (*His manner shows relief. He becomes bantering.*) More flirtations !

MRS. HARTLEY. He asked the child if he might call.

HARTLEY. So you're in it, too, eh, mother ?

MRS. HARTLEY. I ? (*Flurried.*) No, Rupert, no. I've never seen him.

HESTER. I've told you, father, he's a friend of mine. And naturally he wants to meet you.

HARTLEY. Does he ? Very flattered I'm sure ! Wants to meet my money, too, I dare say.

HESTER. You've no right to say things like that, before you've seen him.

HARTLEY. Hoity toity ! Oh, I apologize.

MRS. HARTLEY. Rupert !

HARTLEY. But I've a fairly shrewd idea of the

kind of idle young waster who comes buzzing after a girl if he thinks her father's well off. Somebody no one's ever heard of. Where did you meet him?

HESTER. In the street. (*Defiant.*) Where else could I meet any one?

HARTLEY. I thought so.

HESTER. Yes (*with sudden vehemence.*) Because you've kept us shut up all these years, as though you were afraid to let us be seen. And already you've made up your mind; you're going to take the worst view of it, and put obstacles in the way. Well, I've made up my mind too. You shan't treat me any more as though I were a child.

MRS. HARTLEY. Hester!

HESTER. Mother, I mean it. We're past all that now, thank goodness. I've put up with it because I was weak and a coward. But now——

(*She stops abruptly as the bell is heard.*)

MRS. HARTLEY. That's maybe him.

HARTLEY (*watching HESTER*). Yes, and now? (*HESTER makes a quick movement towards the door.*) Stop!

MRS. HARTLEY. He's outside, father.

HARTLEY. Perhaps. Well, I'll see this young man. I make no promises, but I'll see him.

HESTER (*softened.*) Father!

HARTLEY. I say I make no promises. You've thrown some hard words at me, my girl, but let that be.

MRS. HARTLEY. You'd better go and let him in, dearie.

HARTLEY. She'd better do no such thing. What do we keep a servant for? Let Susan go.

MRS. HARTLEY. She's always such a while.

HARTLEY. Well, I suppose this Mr. Whatever-he-calls-himself can wait as well as another.

MRS. HARTLEY. Yes, Rupert.

(*A slight pause. They all remain motionless in ex-*

pectation. Then the door is opened, and SUSAN enters announcing)—

Mr. Perrin.

(He is a man of about thirty, very self-possessed and assured in manner.)

PERRIN *(halts on threshold, glances round.)* Oh, good evening. *(He sees HESTER.)* Good evening, Miss Hartley.

HESTER *(advancing.)* Father, this is Mr. Perrin.

HARTLEY *(without rising, nods.)* Good evening.

PERRIN. Good evening, sir. *(To MRS. HARTLEY.)* Good evening, ma'am.

HARTLEY. You've come to see me?

PERRIN. I ventured to ask Miss Hartley when I should find you at home.

HARTLEY. Well, you have.

(A slight, uncomfortable pause.)

MRS. HARTLEY *(fussily.)* Can't Mr. Perrin sit down, father?

HARTLEY *(jocose.)* I dare say he could if he tried. You'd better ask him.

MRS. HARTLEY. Hester, dear!

Hester eagerly places a chair for PERRIN, who takes it with a word of thanks, but does not look at her. Another pause.)

MRS. HARTLEY *(making conversation.)* It's been unusually cold for the time of year, hasn't it?

PERRIN. Yes.

MRS. HARTLEY. But then, of course, it usually is.

PERRIN. Yes.

HARTLEY *(who has been enjoying the general discomfiture, turns suddenly upon PERRIN.)* Well?

PERRIN. Just what I was going to say.

HARTLEY. I suppose you were going to mention the reason for giving us this unexpected pleasure?

PERRIN. Quite so, Mr. Hartley. My object was five minutes conversation with you—in private.

HARTLEY. Ah! (*To Mrs. Hartley, grimly.*) Hear that?

MRS. HARTLEY (*rising tremulously.*) I'll just go and put tea back a bit, Rupert.

HARTLEY. Aye, do. (*Dryly.*) This gentleman says five minutes. Give us ten.

MRS. HARTLEY. Yes, Rupert. (*Moving towards door. PERRIN crosses, and holds it open for her. At door she addresses him nervously.*) Thank you. I'm very pleased to have met you.

(*Shakes hands with him, and goes out.*)

HESTER (*as PERRIN still waits by door.*) D'you want me to go too, father?

HARTLEY. I? I've not been consulted. (*Sardonically.*)

PERRIN (*does not meet her eyes.*) I think what I have to say had better be to Mr. Hartley alone.

HESTER (*a little surprised.*) Very well, I— (*To PERRIN.*) I shall only be outside if I'm wanted—

(*Turns to HARTLEY, seems about to speak, then controls herself, and goes out in silence. PERRIN closes the door, and comes back.*)

HARTLEY (*at his ease, filling pipe.*) Now then Mr. —I've forgotten your name?

PERRIN (*standing c.*) Perrin.

HARTLEY. Sit down.

PERRIN (*sits R. of table.*) Thanks.

HARTLEY. Now, you know, it doesn't need much guessing on my part to twig what you're after.

PERRIN (*quietly.*) I believe there you may be mistaken, Mr. Hartley.

HARTLEY. Oh, I may, may I? You haven't come here after my girl, I suppose. Oh, dear no!

PERRIN (*twisting chair so as to face him.*) No, I've come here after you.

HARTLEY (*startled.*) After me? What do you mean?

PERRIN. Precisely what I say. I have come here for the pleasure of a little chat with you, Mr. Hartley.

HARTLEY. Oh! (*Sharply.*) This is some kind of joke, eh?

PERRIN. Not at all. Perfectly serious. Perhaps I might have made myself clearer if I had addressed you by the name of Ross.

HARTLEY (*shows agitation, drops pipe.*) Ross? I—I don't understand you.

PERRIN. Oh, yes, I think you do. Or if Ross does not convey my meaning, let's see (*reflectively,*) there was Watson before that, wasn't there? and Carmichael?

HARTLEY (*springs up furious.*) What the Hell are you talking about?

PERRIN (*surveying him calmly.*) Your very varied and interesting professional career, Mr. Hartley.

HARTLEY. Out of my house!

PERRIN (*smiling.*) Yes. That's about the only argument you've got, isn't it? And not a very good one.

HARTLEY (*walks away, then turns.*) You pretend to know a fat lot about me. How d'you find out?

PERRIN. That's better. (*Genial.*) It's my business to find out things.

HARTLEY. What are you then? (*Quick movement.*) A detective?

PERRIN. Oh, dear me, no. Nothing so unpleasant. I'm a writer, Mr. Hartley.

HARTLEY. A writer?

PERRIN. A journalist, if you like that better. An investigating journalist. It's something of a special line.

HARTLEY. And you mean that you've been investigating me?

PERRIN. Exactly. And as I said, a very interesting story—I use the word in the technical sense—you make.

HARTLEY. I've a good mind to break every bone in your damned body.

PERRIN. But a better mind not to. Your movement just now was picturesque, if melodramatic. Still, it'll make an effective episode in the final instalment.

HARTLEY. Instalment, what of?

PERRIN. Of your exposure. That's what we're working up at the present moment.

HARTLEY. Well! (*Stares, then flings himself into chair again.*) Let's hear it. Mind, I admit nothing. Let's hear what you think you know.

PERRIN (*easily.*) Your admission, Mr. Hartley, would really be superfluous. My information is remarkably complete. It may be necessary to trouble you with a few details about myself. You don't mind?

HARTLEY. Go on.

PERRIN. Thanks. I told you that I'd taken up investigating journalism. It's rather a new development of the power of the press. As a matter of fact, the idea came to me, somewhat suddenly, through a man you have may heard of, named Walford.

HARTLEY (*starting.*) Walford! He's dead!

PERRIN. Yes. (*Placidly.*) But he wasn't when I met him, though very near it. It was about a year ago; you may remember the circumstances? He was run over by a motor, and died shortly afterwards. He was in your employment at the time, as—shall we say confidential clerk?

HARTLEY. Have you come here to blackmail me about Walford? I did everything I could for the man.

PERRIN. Precisely; that was an elementary precaution that you would be hardly likely to neglect. No, my point is that, at the time we speak of, I was a reporter, and was sent by the paper I then represented to interview Walford after the accident. He was not able to tell me much, but his wife offered to take down a few facts, as soon as he was able to recount them, for which I might call later in the day. When I came again, the man was unconscious, but

I received the paper. It was lying with a number of others on a table by his bed—the others being some that had been in his pocket when he was brought home. In the pursuit of my calling, I naturally glanced through these, and finally took them also. Can you form any idea of their character ?

HARTLEY (*agitated.*) Damn !

PERRIN. Exactly. You're quite right ! Amongst other things, they gave me one of the most thoroughly incriminating accounts possible of Carmichael & Co. who had lately baffled the police with such success. This, of course, interested me ; and with it in my possession I was able to work backwards and forwards till I had a fairly clear idea of your activities. You understand I was doing all this in my spare time ; it's been a kind of hobby with me. (*Producing notebook.*) It's all here. I know, for example, about the begging-letter business of '89, and again, under different names, in 1907. Then there was the Bucket-Shop. Much the same dodge that you've been working just now as Ross, in Cannon Street. All very ingenious. As for the rest——

HARTLEY (*broken.*) Stop. That's enough.

PERRIN. There's plenty more.

HARTLEY (*rising.*) Twenty-five years ! And to be pulled down by a d——d reporter !

PERRIN. Yes. (*Complacently.*) I think I am entitled to plume myself a little. You were a clever man, Mr. Hartley ; but chance favoured me, and I made the most of it. (*Closes and replaces pocket book.*)

HARTLEY (*not heeding him.*) And to think that only to-day I'd made up my mind to chuck it all, and settle down with my earnings.

PERRIN (*with professional alertness.*) Ah ! Those must be a tidy sum. I should, of course, be glad of any figures you could give me. It all adds to the interest.

HARTLEY. What are you going to do about it ?

PERRIN. Well, at present, as I say, the thing is my exclusive property. No one else knows anything. But I took a rough idea to the editor of the paper for which I now work, and it was he who sent me down here to finish my investigations on the spot.

HARTLEY. Will money square you ?

PERRIN. Hardly what you would be in a position to offer. I've been promised my own terms for the series—subject, of course, to the stuff being satisfactory, which I think it will be. And one has naturally a certain pride in it as well. It'll help me on a lot.

HARTLEY. What's to happen now ?

PERRIN. The intention is to publish the whole story in weekly instalments, leaving the authorities to take what action they choose.

HARTLEY. That means smash up.

PERRIN. I'm afraid so. Of course I sympathize with you, Mr. Hartley ; but you can see for yourself the thing's a mere matter of business. The expense has been great, and we naturally look for a big return. Your exposure ought to be what we call a scoop.

HARTLEY (*stands irresolute, biting nails.*) I see.

PERRIN. In fact, it's the biggest thing the *Lantern* has had.

HARTLEY (*starting violently.*) The what ?

PERRIN. The paper I represent. The *Bull's-eye Lantern*. A halfpenny every Wednesday.

HARTLEY (*gives a great shout of relief.*) My God ! That's done it !

PERRIN. Done what ?

HARTLEY. Let me out ! Good Lord, what an escape !

PERRIN. What d'you mean ?

HARTLEY. Why, man alive, I am the *Lantern* ! Nine-tenths of the money for it is my money, that I made, and saved, and put in. I could smash it to-morrow if I liked. You've been investigating your owner, my lad !

PERRIN (*bewildered.*) Mr. Hartley, this is a serious matter.

HARTLEY. It might be a jolly sight too serious for you.

PERRIN. How do I know you're speaking the truth?

HARTLEY. Know? You go back and ask your Editor for his list of shareholders. Bliss and Duckworth, those are the two biggest. They're both me.

PERRIN (*irresolute.*) I hardly know what to say.

HARTLEY (*exuberant.*) Of course you don't. There! I bear you no malice. This appeals to my sense of humour, that's what it does.

PERRIN. Of course, if the thing really is yours——

HARTLEY. And a good investment, too. I knew there'd be plenty of the Godly willing enough to pay their halfpenny to see the others tormented.

PERRIN (*stiffly.*) The *Lantern* is doing a great work.

HARTLEY. Yes, that's what I say. Oh, I'm quite satisfied.

PERRIN (*hesitates.*) This naturally places me in a somewhat awkward position.

HARTLEY. You did that to me, my lad, two minutes ago. When you called me Ross just now, it was one of the nastiest shocks I've had. I assure you (*with a gesture*) I felt the rope round my throat.

PERRIN. Fraud is not a capital offence, Mr. Hartley.

HARTLEY (*overbearing.*) Well, well. Can't I express myself! Don't be so damned literal.

PERRIN. I beg your pardon. (*Rises.*) But in the meantime we're keeping Mrs. and Miss Hartley from their tea. Perhaps I'd better——

(*He makes a move towards the door.*)

HARTLEY (*with a change of manner.*) Stop a bit. Miss Hartley, you said. Thanks for reminding me. You got admission here, I think, by making love to my daughter?

PERRIN (*uncomfortable.*) Hardly quite that, Mr. Hartley. You'd be the first to see that I had to obtain one or two details, and—well—that was the way.

HARTLEY. You seem to me a pretty cool customer.

PERRIN (*slyly.*) We have to earn dividends.

HARTLEY. Oh, I'm not blaming you. Every man to his job.

PERRIN (*relieved.*) Thanks. Then I'll wish you good evening. I shall, of course, tell the Editor that this matter goes no further.

HARTLEY. You leave that to me. And—the investigations ?

PERRIN (*matter-of-fact.*) I must try those somewhere else.

HARTLEY (*staggered for a moment. Then recovers himself.*) Must you ? I wonder.

PERRIN. What do you mean ?

HARTLEY (*watching him.*) I've been getting the notion, Perrin, that I might even take a hand at that paper myself. I'll want something to do with my time. And there's big money in it, if it's properly run.

PERRIN. Undoubtedly.

HARTLEY. If I had a real live man to work with, who meant to get on, and didn't mind how, I'd make it worth his while !

PERRIN. As Editor ?

HARTLEY (*considering him.*) Possibly. These ideas come to me, and they want working out. We'd have to find something for the present chap ; he knows too much to be chucked. But I generally succeed ; and, as I say, there's a fortune waiting for the man I choose to push.

PERRIN. Do you mean me ?

HARTLEY. Well, I was thinking of my son-in-law.

PERRIN. Your son-in-law ?

HARTLEY. I haven't got one at present. But things might turn out.

PERRIN. I don't understand you.

HARTLEY. Oh, yes, I think you do. (*Seats himself above table, motioning Perrin to do the same.*) Look here, Perrin, you've been spooning my girl. To you it was nothing; just a trick of your trade.

PERRIN. I've explained all that.

HARTLEY. Not to her. She thinks it serious; and I've always meant that, if a man came along that wasn't a fool, or too much of a knave, he should have her. Well?

PERRIN. Mr. Hartley, your attitude is preposterous. The thing's impossible.

HARTLEY. Are you married already?

PERRIN. Certainly not.

HARTLEY. Very well, then. Let me tell you it's not such a bad offer. I make it because I believe that, with you and I together, there's almost nothing we couldn't do.

PERRIN. Perhaps.

HARTLEY. It's a risk, of course. In a way, you aren't worthy of her. But a man can be a pretty big rogue in business, and a good husband. I know that.

PERRIN. You forget that there is also a certain risk attached to entering your family, Mr. Hartley.

HARTLEY. Not at all. But the money's safe. I'd settle the *Lantern* on Hester at her marriage. She'd have that—whatever happened to me.

PERRIN. I see.

HARTLEY. So there it is. It's been one of my professional maxims, when you see what you want, not to waste time. I've made my offer. Take it or leave it.

PERRIN. Mr. Hartley, I'm sorry. The thing's impossible. It's indecent.

HARTLEY. Oh, if you begin to talk about decency (*sardonic*), there's no more to be said. You refuse, then?

PERRIN. I'm sorry. (*Rises.*) As I say, I'd better get back to town at once. I'm sorry.

HARTLEY. Not at all. (*Rises also, moves to bell beside fireplace and rings.*) They'll let you out.

PERRIN. Of course I fully realize——
(*He stops, as the door opens, and Hester comes in quickly. She stands looking from one to the other.*)

HESTER. Yes, father?

HARTLEY. It was for Susan I rang. (*Vexed.*) To show this gentleman out.

HESTER. I'll do it, father. (*Moves toward PERRIN, lays her hand on his arm. In an undertone to him, anxiously.*) Is it all right?

HARTLEY (*at fireplace, overhearing.*) Yes, you do well to ask him.

HESTER. Father! If that means you've refused, it doesn't make any difference. (*Turning to PERRIN, speaks steadily.*) I'll come if you want me, any how.

PERRIN. (*He cannot meet her eyes.*) I beg your pardon.

HESTER. Why?

PERRIN. I can't explain. Only—I beg your pardon. I must go.

HESTER. Wait! (*To HARTLEY.*) Father, you must hear me. I don't want to be undutiful, but I owe him more than I owe you now, because he made me love him. Perhaps you can separate us, but that won't make the least difference to the only thing that matters. I shall go on loving him, and thanking him, always.

HARTLEY (*grim, to conceal how much this has moved him.*) I congratulate you, Perrin. You seem to have made a pretty complete job of it.

HESTER. What do you mean? I don't understand.

PERRIN (*crosses quickly to her.*) And by God's help you never shall. You make me ashamed. But will you trust me once more?

HESTER. Why, of course. I've never left off.

PERRIN. You shan't regret it. (*He leaves her, and comes to HARTLEY.*) Mr. Hartley (*in an undertone,*) I'm in your hands. I accept your conditions.

HARTLEY (*same tone.*) And the—investigations?

PERRIN. There. (*Gives him book.*)

HARTLEY (*pockets it swiftly.*) Good!

HESTER (*who has only heard the last word.*) Oh, father, that means you consent?

HARTLEY. Perhaps. (*With secret irony.*) He—he over-persuaded me.

HESTER (*looks proudly at PERRIN.*) Ah! I knew he would.

HARTLEY. Did you? (*With a movement of genuine affection, he puts both his hands on her shoulders.*) And you really care enough for him to chance it? It's always a risk, you know.

HESTER (*simply.*) He made me care enough. He could do anything. See how he got round you!

HARTLEY. Yes. (*Sardonic again.*) He's a wonderfully convincing talker.

PERRIN (*takes HESTER's hand.*) I'll do more than talk.

HARTLEY. Well, well. That remains to be proved. By the way, what's your christian name?

HESTER (*shyly.*) It's George, father.

HARTLEY. Is it. (*Still highly amused at himself.*) Well, George, stop and have some supper with us. (*He turns to MRS. HARTLEY, who at this moment appears in the doorway.*) Mother (*with a gesture of introduction towards Perrin,*) This is George!

CURTAIN.

Continued from second page of cover.

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